

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1848
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 3310

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, IS
SUBJECT: IMPACT OF THE TERRORIST ATTACK

1. SUMMARY. THE TERRORIST ATTACK OF MARCH 11 HAS LEFT MOST ISRAELIS WITH DEEP FEELING OF SORROW, ANGER AND CERTAINTY THAT THE HARDLINE APPROACH TO PALESTINIAN POLITICAL QUESTION IS CORRECT. THE COUNTRY WILL GO INTO DEEP MOURNING. AT SOME POINT THIS WILL GIVE WAY TO THE QUESTIONING OF SECURITY PROCEDURES WHICH FAILED. THE ANGER WILL PROBABLY BE MANIFESTED IN A RETALIATORY ATTACK AGAINST THE PLO, ALTHOUGH THE TIMING AND TYPE OF BLOW MAY BE DISPUTED WITHIN THE CABINET. US SILENCE ON THIS ISSUE WILL BE INTERPRETED HERE AS ACCEPTANCE OF RETALIATION. THE MOST IMPORTANT IMPACT ON U.S. CONFIDENTIAL

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FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS OF THE TRAGEDY OF MARCH 11 WILL BE EVEN STIFFER ISRAELI RESISTANCE TO ANY CONCESSIONS ON 242 AND THE PALESTINAIN PROBLEM. BEGIN AND MOST ISRAELIS SEE THE ATTACK AS PROFF THAT THE HARD-LINE POLICY IS TOTALLY JUSTIFIED. END SUMMARY.

2. YESTERDAY'S TERRORIST ATTACK, THE WORST IN ISRAEL'S

HISTORY, HAS HAD AN IMMEDIATE AND PROFOUND EFFECT ON ALL ISRAELIS. AS A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE, THE FIRST EVER CURFEW WAS DECLARED, AFFECTING 300,000 CITIZENS IN THE NORTHERN SUBURBS OF TEL AVIV, AS IDF AND POLICE CONTINUE TO HUNT FOR THE THREE TERRORISTS STILL UNACCOUNTED FOR. OUR INITIAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF THIS OPERATION FOCUSES ON ITS EFFECT ON THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS, THE FUTURE ACTIONS OF THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT AND THE LIKELIHOOD OF RETALIATION, AND THE FACTORS THAT INFORMED ISRAELIS BELIEVE LAY BEHIND FATAH'S STRIKE.

3. IT CAN BE EXPECTED THAT BEGIN WILL STIFFEN HIS POSITION ON 242 AND THE PALESTINIAN ISSUES. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, HE WILL CARRY MUCH OF THE COUNTRY WITH HIM IN THIS STIFFENING. THE ATTACK, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, WILL TAKE MUCH OF THE WIND OUT OF THE SAILS OF THOSE ISRAELIS WHO WERE INCREASING THEIR OPPOSITION TO BEGIN'S INTERPRETATION OF 242. FOR EXAMPLE, MK YOSEF ROM (HERUT) POINTED OUT THAT IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE THIS WEEK FOR A GROUP OF RESERVISTS TO WRITE A CRITICAL LETTER TO BEGIN. IT WILL ALSO STRENGTHEN THOSE WHO ARGUE THAT IT IS FUTILE TO TRY TO TALK WITH THE PALESTINAINS. IT WILL, IN ADDITION, STRENGTHEN BEGIN AND OTHERS WHO ARGUE THAT ISRAELIS CAN RELY ON NO ONE BUT THEMSELVES FOR THEIR SECURITY. A GENERAL THEME IN THE PRESS REACTION TODAY IS THAT

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NOW THE U.S. WILL BETTER UNDERSTAND ISRAEL'S PREOCCUPATION WITH SECURITY.

4. NOT EVERYBODY IS MOVING TOWARD A HARDER LINE. SOME LOCAL OBSERVERS ARE SAYING THAT BEGIN SHOULD NOT USE THE ATTACK AS AN ARGUMENT FOR THE RETENTION OF THE TERRITORIES. IT IS POINTED OUT THAT ISRAEL EXPERIENCED TERRORIST ATTACKS BEFORE 1967 AND THE RETENTION OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES WOULD NOT PREVENT SUCH EVENTS IN THE FUTURE. SOME VOICES OF MODERATION ARGUE THAT THE ATTACK ILLUSTRATES AGAIN THE NECESSITY OF FINDING A SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. NEVERTHELESS, IN THE EMOTION OF THE MOMENT SUCH ARGUMENTS APPEAL TO FEW ISRAELIS.

5. THE GOI WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY OPEN AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE SECURITY LAPSES WHICH PERMITTED A DAYLIGHT LANDING AND PENETRATION OF THE DENSELY POPULATED COASTAL PLAIN. THE IDF HAS NOT COME UNDER ATTACK YET WHILE THE POPULATION IS STILL IN SHOCK AND MOURNING, BUT IT PROBABLY WILL LATER. THERE IS SOME SMALL COMFORT THAT AN EVEN GREATER TRAGEDY WAS

AVERTED BECAUSE THE TERRORISTS WERE STOPPED
BEFORE THEY REACHED THE CENTER OF CROWDED TEL AVIV ON
SATURDAY NIGHT.

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O 121800Z MAR 78
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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y P A R A 10

6. SOME OBSERVERS PREDICT THAT WE MAY ALSO SEE SOME
RENEWED INTEREST IN A SEPARATE AGREEMENT WITH EGYPT.
FOR EXAMPLE, ONE LABOR MK (HARISH) SAID THAT ISRAEL'S
POSITION ON THE PLO WOULD TOUGHEN BUT THAT ISRAEL,
AFTER YESTERDAY, AND EGYPT, AFTER LARNACA, WOULD COME
CLOSER TO JOINT OPPOSITION TO THE PLO. IN THE SAME WAY,
BOTH EGYPT AND ISRAEL SHOULD SEE YESTERDAY'S ATTACK
AS AN EFFORT TO UNDERMINE THEIR NEGOTIATIONS AND THEY
SHOULD SHARE A DESIRE NOT TO SEE THAT EFFORT SUCCEED.

7. THE GOI PROBABLY WILL REVIEW ITS POLICY REGARDING
SOUTH LEBANON. THE ISRAELIS CAN BE EXPECTED TO OPPOSE
MORE STRONGLY THAN EVER SUCH OCCURRENCES AS LAST WEEK'S
DEPLOYMENT OF SAIQA UNITS IN SOUTH LEBANON -- EVEN
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THOUGH THE TERRORISTS REPORTEDLY EMBARKED IN BEIRUT.

8. ALL OBSERVERS WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN AND MOST PRESS COMMENTATORS PREDICT ISRAELI RETALIATION. BEGIN AND HIS CABINET ARE LIKELY TO BE UNITED IN THIS ALTHOUGH THERE MAY BE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION ON HOW AND WHEN. ONE WELL-KNOWN OBSERVER PREDICTED THAT BEGIN WOULD SEEK A "SPECTACULAR." MOST BELIEVE THAT SUCH AN EVENT COULD TAKE PLACE ONLY WHILE BEGIN IS IN THE COUNTRY AND IT IS SAID THIS IS ONE OF THE REASONS FOR POSTPONING HIS VISIT TO WASHINGTON. OTHERS ARGUE THAT HE WILL WANT TO VISIT WASHINGTON FIRST IN ORDER TO MAKE THE POINT WITH THE PRESIDENT, WHILE YESTERDAY'S ATTACK IS FRESH IN EVERYONE'S MEMORY AND UNDILUTED BY AN ISRAELI RETALIATION, THAT THE PALESTINAINS CANNOT BE TRUSTED. THE RETALIATION WOULD FOLLOW HIS RETURN.

9. THE REACTION HERE TO THE CLAIM BY FATAH OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ATTACK IS PREDICTABLE. MAARIV, FOR EXAMPLE, SAYS THAT THE ATTACK WAS NOT CARRIED OUT BY "MADMEN FROM THE "REJECTION FRONT," BUT BY THAT PART OF THE PLO UNDER ARAFAT WHO IS ALWAYS PRESENTED AS THE MODERATE ELEMENT IN THE ORGANIZATION." ANY DIVISIONS WITHIN FATAH ITSELF THAT MIGHT EXPLAIN YESTERDAY'S TRAGEDY ARE SIMPLY NOT OF CONCERN TO ISRAELIS TODAY.

10. SEEN BY ISRAELIS, IT SEEMS OBVIOUS THAT THE TIMING OF THE ATTACK WAS CLEARLY DESIGNED TO MAKE AN IMPACT ON THE EVE OF BEGIN'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON. ONE RESPECTED ACADEMIC SAID THAT IF THE GOAL WAS TO DRAMATIZE THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE AS BEGIN DEPARTS FOR WASHINGTON, THEN IT WAS A VERY SUCCESSFUL OPERATION FROM THAT POINT

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OF VIEW. OBSERVERS HERE BELIEVE THAT THE ATTACK AND FATAH'S ROLE IN IT REFLECTS THE GROWING RADICALIZATION OF THE PLO AND THE SHIFT IN LEADERSHIP FROM ARAFAT TOWARD HABBASH. ISRAELI SEE THIS GROWING RADICALIZATION AS EVIDENCE THAT THE PLO HAS ABANDONED THE POLITICAL PROCESS.

11. COMMENT: THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT BEGIN AND THE ISRAELI PUBLIC WILL INTERPRET U.S. SILENCE THUS FAR ON THE QUESTION OF RETALIATION AS TACIT ADMINISTRATION APPROVAL, OR AT LEAST SILENT ACCEPTANCE, OF A RETALIATORY

RAID ON THE PLO.
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